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Ex-Warden at St. Louis prison says he was targeted for requesting safety upgrades

Terry Camp
Aug 5, 2026

Warden at St. Louis prison felt targeted for speaking out

ST. LOUIS, Mich. (WJRT) - A former warden at the St. Louis Correctional Facility is speaking out about his reassignment last month, citing ongoing concerns about low staffing and assaults on officers.

John Christiansen, who has worked for the Michigan Department of Corrections for 27 years and served as warden at the Gratiot County facility for the last three years, told ABC12 he is not speaking in his official capacity and the views expressed are his personal opinions. He says he was reassigned after urging the administration to make changes to improve staff and prisoner safety.

In July, Christiansen wrote an email to the assistant deputy director of MDOC warning about dangerous staffing levels.

"I said someone is going to get killed in here and I don't want to be here for that," Christiansen said.

He was reassigned that night. The email came after he learned only 14 corrections officers would be working at the prison the next day, when there should have been 51 positions filled.

ABC 12 News has reported over the past few months about violent attacks by inmates on corrections officers. Some of those officers were hospitalized.

Christiansen says he proposed changes, including bringing in staff from other facilities to help with the officer shortage. Those changes went into effect after he was sent to a desk job in Lansing last month.

"It's just disheartening that this administration held those back, when it affected the staff," Christiansen said.

More than half of the 1,000 inmates at St. Louis are classified as Level V, requiring maximum security. While there have been numerous officer assaults inside the walls, Christiansen says MDOC has also been speeding up paroles for inmates at St. Louis over the past couple of years.

"It's disheartening because these are the people that are coming back to live next door to you and me," Christiansen said.

He also addressed concerns about retaliation.

"This administration is vindictive," Christiansen said.

Christiansen expects his contract with MDOC will not be renewed in November.

"I have to do the right thing, and the right thing is to bring attention to what is happening," Christiansen said.

ABC12 sent an email to MDOC for comments on Christiansen's claims but did not hear back.

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Terry Camp
Anchor/Reporter

Terry Camp anchors ABC12 News First at Four and ABC12 News at 5:30. He also reports on issues in the Great Lakes Bay Region.

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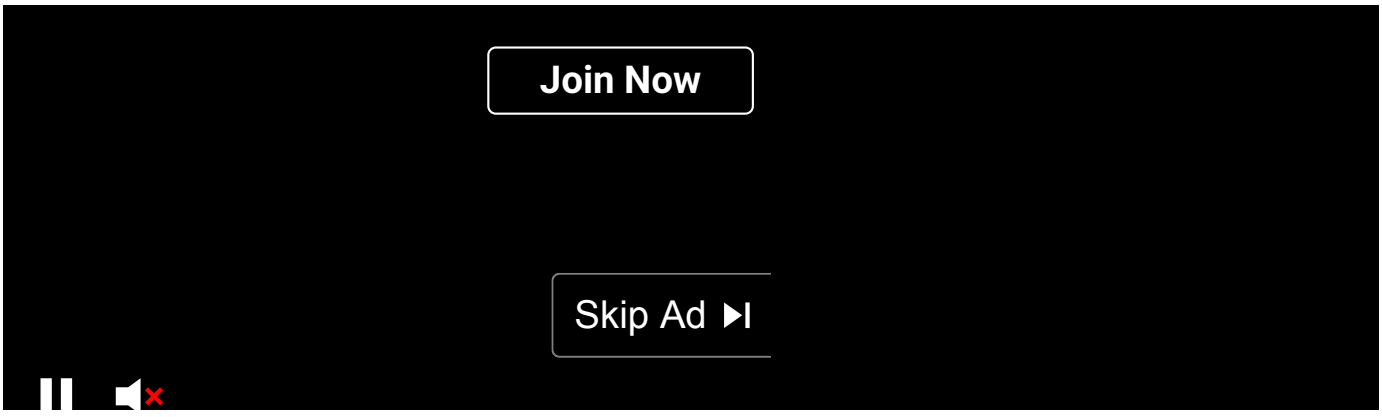

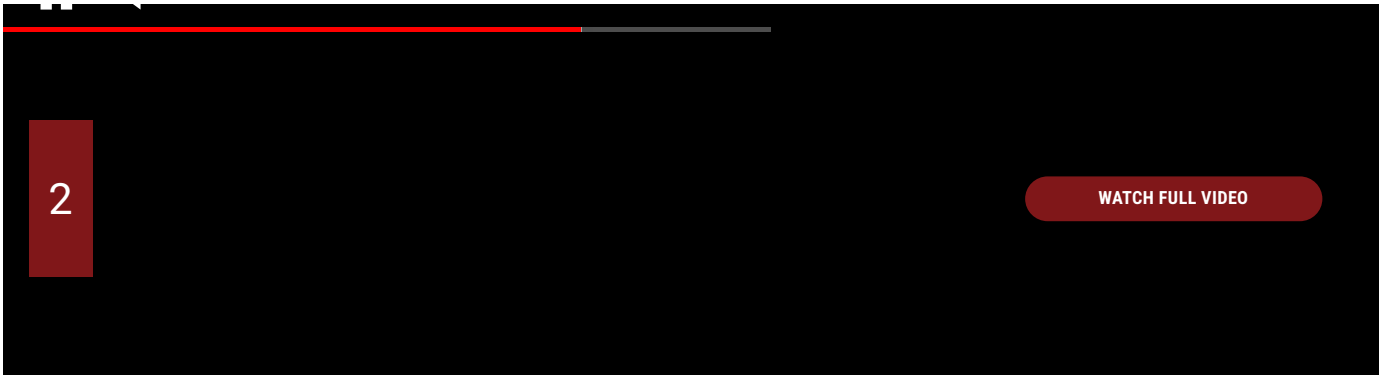

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